1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

itself is made of wood, plaster, bamboo and thatch. All buildings have their entrance to the east and face north; the north-south sides are the longest. The first portions of the building to be erected are the five upright supports, one in the centre and one at each corner; they consist of roughly shaped tree-trunks. For the erection of these supports and for the building of the stone wall an overseer is necessary; for the rest of the building no director is used. The floor is usually woven bamboo, but some of the richer people cover the bamboo with smoothed planks; the walls are always of bamboo covered with plaster, occasionally with wooden supports. Except in the Mandal's house, where there are a couple of window frames, the south and west walls are blind; the entrance, which is reached by a pair of notched logs or rough steps, is always on the east; and round the east and north side runs a balcony of plaited bamboo. The north wall is mostly open to the balcony but there are usually wooden shutters which can be closed when the nights are cold. The balcony is used a great deal; for gossiping in the daytime or during warm evenings, for a great variety of household tasks, since there is seldom much light inside the house, as a place where fowls can roost, and as a latrine for infants, invalids, the drunk or the lazy. The roof is made of reeds hung over bamboo and supported on a wooden frame; the north and south sides of the roof cover the whole space between the roof-tree and the top of the wall, but the east and west sides are somewhat inserted at a slightly lower angle, so that there is a triangle (either empty or filled with widely-woven bamboo) on the east and west sides under the roof-tree which is meant to provide ventilation and an escape for the smoke; the device is not very successful and often of an evening I was half-blinded by smoke so that I could not see across a room and the tears streamed down my face. The Lepchas are completely inured to this atmosphere and could not understand why I coughed and choked.

The great majority of Lepcha houses consist of two rooms and an attic; a few of the poorest have only one room, and a couple of the biggest houses have a third small store-room beyond the *dé-ong*. The first room on entering from the east is the *thop-song*, or, as I shall refer to it in future, the kitchen. Round the side are either slightly raised shelves or a bar set into the wooden floor, which marks the sleeping places of the members of the household. During the day the bedding and pillows are rolled up and put away in boxes and are only brought out just before retiring to sleep. Except

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[352] 342 for the sleeping places of grandparents or parents-in-law, which are avoided out of respect, these sleeping places serve as seats in the daytime. In the centre of the dividing wall is the cooking place; [354] this is a built-up square of pounded earth and clay, perhaps five feet in each direction and raised about a foot off the ground; into this while it is still soft are inserted four upright stones to support the cooking pots over the logs of wood. Above the fire-place is a drying ledge of woven bamboo hanging from the rafters. There is a very fragile ceiling of bamboo which serves as a store-house; it is entered through a trap-door which is placed nearly directly above the cooking-place so as to allow the smoke to escape and which is reached by a notched log.

The dividing wall which separates the two rooms is usually a wooden partition (occasionally bamboo) with a door, or at least a door-frame, in the side nearest the balcony. This second room is called *dé-ong*. In the houses of lamas and of the more pious laymen [353] 554 there is an altar against the south wall. This altar varies enormously with the wealth and inclinations of the individual; some of the most elaborate are miniature reproductions of the altars in the monastery, with large metal images and musical instruments and other decorations; and in one or two houses there are pigeon-holes on either side containing the sixteen volumes of the Boom, the shortened version of the Kangyour. In other houses the altar is no more than a wooden box set up on end, with one small metal image inside, and sometimes not even that.

The *dé-ong*, whether it is fitted up as a private lamaist temple or not, is always more or less of a ceremonial room, for in it are performed the numerous ceremonies which occur in the life of everyone, for feared or actual illness or death, or for marriage. Ordinarily the room is little used and is only slept in by lamas, and not always by them. The attitude to the *dé-ong* is similar to that held towards the parlour in lower-middle-class English homes. It is the place where distinguished visitors are received, where emotionally important events of a slightly ceremonious nature take place; it is not a room which is used by the family in ordinary everyday life. In one or two houses there is a small and narrow store-room beyond the *dé-ong*; in other houses the *dé-ong* is [251] used for this purpose also. Heads of maize and millet are suspended from the bamboo ceiling to dry, and sacks of grain and flour are kept under the altar. People fetching stores from this place are meant to prostrate themselves three times at each visit, but usually

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

lights; grain and flowers are also offered to the gods from time to time.

On either side of the altar are pigeon-holes, in which the 222 volumes of the Teng-gyur (the great Commentary on the Lamaist Scriptures) are stored, the actual scripture itself, the Kang-gyur as it is called (108 volumes), being stored in the upstairs room which we used as a bedroom. There are no chairs in the monastery, the Lamas* (here called Yukman) sitting cross-legged on planks on the floor, which are arranged in two lines running at right angles to the altar. The head Lama, or Dorje Lopön, has a rough sort of seat on which he, too, sits cross-legged. This, however, is raised a little above the level of the floor.

The main hall takes up most of the ground floor, but at one end there is a room, only about nine feet wide, which in addition to a small altar, complete with image, houses three enormous prayer-drums, which ring a bell each time they are turned completely round. These drums, or perhaps barrels would be a better word, are about ten feet high, and each is completely filled with strips of paper on which the magic formula *Om mane padme hum* has been written over and over again. One turn of the drum is equivalent to uttering this mystic sentence the same number of times that it has been written on the paper within. When one has nothing better to do, therefore, a quiet half-hour of turning a giant prayer-wheel is as good a means of acquiring merit as any other. People would often drop in at odd moments to do this.

The largest of the three drums had a rather elaborate top that projected through the ceiling into a small room above, which we used as a bathroom. This top was decorated with a muslin flounce of red, blue, and yellow and looked something like a rather dirty ballet skirt. When the drum was turned

*The term Lama should rightly only be applied to a monk who has reached a certain definite standing in the Buddhist church by reason of his learning and piety. It is extremely doubtful if anyone in Lingtem has any claim to this title; but since the term is commonly, though quite incorrectly, used by most Western writers to denote any Lamaist monk, and since the Lepchas themselves use it in this way, I have decided to follow the general practice.

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these should never be placed to the east of the house or the occupants will die: whenever possible they should be placed to the north. Inside the house, water must be stored on the north side; the fire-place should be on the west; and the grinding-mill should always stand on the north. I should add, however, that I hardly ever saw this arrangement carried out in any of the houses I entered, and the old Hlaribu said that it did not really matter.

Assuming that a site has been selected which does not too greatly contravene the above instructions, the Lama will visit it and make offerings to any spirits who might be disturbed by reason of the turning of the earth, or by the cutting down of trees with which to build the house. At the same time the original handful of earth, which the builder first took to the Lama, must be returned to the exact spot from which it was taken. After this the four corner-posts are set up, and the house may be completed without further disturbance. All houses, even temporary field-huts, must be built with at least two posts; and in no circumstances should a house ever be built in exact alignment with another.

As soon as the house is completed Lamas will come and perform the *Li Tashi* ceremony, which consists in offering rice and flowers; but this I never saw. In addition to the *Li Tashi* performed when the house is finished, this ceremony should be carried out, if possible, annually for the first three years. It is entirely optional whether it is done or not when a new floor is put down; but many people have the ceremony performed once every year as a matter of course. This, however, depends upon their means, since the necessary Lamas have to be paid and fed. Apart from the reading of holy books by four or five Lamas, the principal part of the ceremony consists of smearing the house pillars with a mixture of ox-blood, spirit, and butter by the Mandal. For this purpose an ox is sacrificed the day before, and its flesh offered to the gods and devils of the land on which the house stands, and to any spirits that might be dwelling in the planks

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it is usual to call in some experienced old man to fasten such things up. None of the things had been removed from the house while the roof was being repaired. It is said that a new roof lasts for about seven years, after which it must be completely renewed. No nails are used in the construction of houses, all woodwork being mortised and tied where necessary with canes. Even large buildings like the monastery are constructed entirely without nails.

* * * * *

There is no furniture in Lepcha houses; beds, tables (except the low Tibetan variety), and chairs being unknown. The kitchen stove is merely a platform of earth, on which some half-dozen large stones are placed as supports for the cooking pots. These are generally of copper or brass, and I never once saw any kind of earthenware vessel and was told they were never used. Stores of maize and millet hang from the rafters, and other grains are kept in baskets stacked against the walls. The family bedding may generally be seen draped across these baskets during the day-time; and unwanted clothing is suspended from bamboo slivers inserted in cracks in the walls. I occasionally noticed that the walls had been papered with old newspapers. One such was plastered with years-old copies of the *Evening News*, one of which advertised the film of "Bengal Lancer"; but how these ever reached Lingtem is beyond my comprehension. Our own cast-off papers were always in much demand, one man in particular asking constantly for pictures of wars. He seemed to think that war was a fine experience, and talked of little else, although of course he had never seen one. Anyhow, the walls of his cottage are no longer bare: and for the rest of his life he can sit in peace while gazing at pictures of Franco's atrocities. I hope sincerely that this is the nearest to war he will get.

Water is brought in long hollow bamboos and stored in copper pots, of the type that form part of the marriage gifts. These do not hold more than a couple of gallons, and are

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778

Lamas preparing the *tormas* which will later be offered to Kinchinjunga.

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415
352

Lamas at worship. The duty of the novice is to beat the large drum, in front of which he is sitting. Note the bamboo container of *chi* by the side of each Lama.

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346

At the conclusion of the service the offering is brought out and exhibited to Kinchinjunga.

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